

SECURITY INFORMATION

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Copy No. 8CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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5 May 1953PROBABILITY OF SOVIET RELEASE OF SOME  
WORLD WAR II PRISONERS

There are indications that prisoners of various nationalities held as "war criminals" in the Soviet Union may be freed.

Although Pravda did not respond to the president's challenge to release World War II prisoners of war, Foreign Minister Molotov has stated several times recently that the amnesty decree will apply to war criminals as well as to Soviet citizens. The release of prisoners would produce a favorable reaction in the West at little cost to the USSR.

There are also indications that POW's will be repatriated from other parts of the Orbit. Reliable reports suggest that Hungary is planning to return 257 German prisoners and Communist China has already repatriated about 15,000 Japanese POW's in a manner calculated to enhance the prestige of Communist China and the Japanese Communists. Some non-Orbit nationals may also be released as a result of amnesty decrees now being effected in the Satellites.

During World War II Soviet forces captured about 7,000,000 prisoners. Of this total, about 50 percent were Germans, 20 percent Japanese and the rest Italians, Austrians, Finns, Rumanians and Hungarians with small numbers of French, Dutch and Spanish.

Between 1945 and 1950 the USSR repatriated approximately 2,529,000 POW's. The UN POW Commission estimated that about half of the original 7,000,000 had died in the USSR or were missing, leaving approximately 1,500,000 yet to be returned. In April and May of 1950, however, TASS announced that all Japanese and Germans had been repatriated except for a few thousand Japanese, about 13,000 Germans sentenced for war crimes, and a few score patients being kept for medical treatment.

In reply to the repeated requests of the UN Commission and the German and Japanese Governments for information concerning the 1,500,000 unaccounted for, the Soviet press has repeatedly stated that there are no other prisoners to be repatriated. In spite of these official declarations, however, small numbers of

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German and Austrian POW's were quietly returned in 1952. The manner of their return suggests that Moscow is very sensitive about the POW issue and prefers to conduct any further releases unobtrusively. At the same time, the USSR is well aware that possession of the prisoners gives it an advantage in playing on German, Japanese, Austrian, Italian or French sentiments. For this reason and because of a desire to continue to indoctrinate and train some prisoners willing to become Communists, Moscow may hold back some POW's for future exploitation.

Moscow's insistence that the 15,000 prisoners still admittedly in the Soviet Union are war criminals or convalescents permits it to avoid compromising the Communist demand in the Korean negotiations for full repatriation of all POW's. To support this position Moscow has consistently pointed to the Geneva Convention of 1949 which provides that "prisoners of war shall be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities."

The Kremlin's long-standing public support of the principle of full repatriation as well as its fear of defections from the Orbit through any compromise of this concept makes it highly unlikely that it will concede in principle even if the Communists compromise in fact.

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APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS DEALING WITH PRISONERS  
OF WAR IN THE USSR

I. GERMANS

- 1945 - May TASS announced that USSR had taken 3,180,000 POW's up to that time.
- 1947 - March Molotov stated that USSR had repatriated 1,003,975 German POW's and still held 890,531.
- 1950 - May 4 TASS announced repatriation of German POW's completed; a total of 1,939,063 German POW's had been repatriated. However, 13,000 were still detained. Of these, 9,717 were still held as war criminals; 3,815 for investigation; 14 as hospital cases.
- 1952 - Jan. Official UN Commission estimated 70,000 POW's remaining in USSR.
- 1952 - June 286 German POW's quietly returned from USSR to Germany.

II. JAPANESE

- 1948 - Aug. According to figures released by Soviet authorities 568,000 Japanese POW's still in captivity; 510,409 POW's had been repatriated.
- 1949 - May 20 TASS announced repatriation of Japanese POW's completed. However, 2,467 prisoners still detained, of these 1,487 as war criminals; 9 for medical treatment; 971 sent to China because of crimes against the Chinese People's Republic.
- 1952 - June 13 TASS reported again that only 1,487 POW's convicted of war crimes remained in the USSR.
- 1952 - Aug. Japanese Government claimed there still are 340,000 POW's who have not been returned; 77,000 believed to be still living.

### III. ITALIANS

1943 - Mar. TASS announced USSR had taken 115,000 Italian POW's.

1945 - Sept. Soviet authorities declared that only 19,640 Italian POW's remained in USSR. Claimed 20,000 returned.

1950 - May Returning POW General Recognio stated less than 20 Italians remained in POW camps.

1952 - Feb. USSR denied it retained any Italian POW's. Italian Government claimed 11,000 Italians remained as POW's.

### IV. AUSTRIANS

1948 - Feb. 55,000 Austrian POW's had been returned from USSR; 45,000 estimated by Austrians to be still missing.

1953 - Jan. Austrian Government estimated 1000 POW's and 920 civilian internees remained in USSR.

1953 - Apr 28 Molotov stated to Austrian political representative that amnesty decree would apply to Austrians serving sentences in USSR. Austrians estimated that this would allow the release of 198 POW's for reason of age and 39 because of sentence reduction.

### V. FRENCH

1946 - July French Government requested permission to visit Soviet POW camps in order to find at least some of 350,000 Frenchmen unaccounted for.

1952 - Jan. French Ambassador in Moscow was informed by the Soviet Government that it was returning the last five French prisoners of war in the USSR. He expressed appreciation but said that the Soviet count and his count of French POW's differed.